What affect has *SOCIAL MEDIA* had on the body image of the generation z?

Current Situation and Problems of Social Media and Body Image:

In a world where social media has transformed society (Singa, 2015) it is important to acknowledge the possible effects of a modern western culture which emphasises thinness (Schwartz, 2004) accompanied by social platforms which infiltrate most aspects of everyone's lives – but especially the generation z.

But who are the 'generation z'?

Described as digital natives the generation Z are born after 1995 and are more equipped with technology than previous generations. They live and breathe technology and are the first generation born into a globally connected world of tech. (Villiers, 2017)

- demand instant information + communication and don't like waiting for a response. (Villiers, 2017)
- They are impatient, instant minded, have acquired ADD (attention deficit disorder), low attention span, and are the most materialistic and entitled generation to date. (Generation White Paper, 2011)
- manage multiple identities online and offline. (Seemiller, 2018)
- use social media to every aspect of their lives, from education to entertainment. (Seemiller, 2018)
- politically, economically, socially. (Seemiller, 2018) and environmentally -aware. (Singh, 2016)
- will fight to be heard despite their age (Slavin, 2013)
- most ethically diverse generation (Harber, 2011)
- raised in the 2000s during the most profound changes in the century who exists in a world with web, internet, smart phones, laptops, freely available networks and digital media. (Rascha, 2011)
- often fight for and grapple with politics, war, global relationships, immigration, the economy, innovation, social issues, racial equality, gender equality, and family structures. (Seemiller, 2018)

Demographic:

Age: 0 – 27
Location: Western World
Occupation: Student, Graduate
Ethnicity: Any
Gender: Any

Summary:

Educated young people not afraid to fight for what they want. Expect in any aspect of their lives. Often expecting a lot from employers, educators, and their families this generation are fast consumers of unlimited content with low attention spans and a purpose for change.

Psychographic:

Motivated by environmental, political and social change.
Strong beliefs in change for good.
Prioritise happiness over success.
Demanding, materialistic and educated.

Social Media and Body Image

Referred to as 'the wide range of Internet based and mobile services that allow users to participate in online exchanges, contribute user-created content or join online communities.' (J. Miller, 2016) social media is something which rules our lives. From escapism to social interaction or brand marketing, the platforms have integrated themselves into everyday life. Social media are so versatile that there are 10 uses for the different platforms.

Purpose of Social Media Use

Uses and Gratifications of Social Media
(Whiting, 2013)

- Instagram (a platform which allows its users to share photos and videos with others) has over 100 million active users
- they upload around 80 million photos per day. (Instagram, 2013)

- The influencer market represents a $10 billion industry in 2020 (Haenlein, et al., 2020; Gil-Or, 2010; Smith, 2011)
- Over 88% of marketers are now using social media platforms to plug their products or campaigns

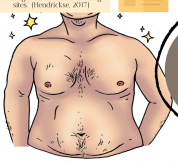
- Gives monetary success value to marketers and influencers
- Has a detrimental affect on generation z who have known nothing other than edited celebrities plastered on their screens selling 'skinny-tea's or the newest makeup product

- Internet "appearance exposure" positively correlates with increased body image disturbance. (Meier, 2018)
- Specific social network site activities like viewing and uploading photos and seeking negative feedback "are viewed as problematic" (Holland, 2016) to ones body image
- No surprise the generation z, raised manipulated photos more positively than the originals. (Kleemans, 2018)

This generation, able to manipulate multiple identities on and offline do so in order to feel good enough for the society that infiltrates the perfect body through repeated exposure to influencers living the perfect life.

Despite their resilience their body dissatisfaction and drive for thinness can also be associated to exposure to images on social networking sites. (Hendrickse, 2017)

Critics and fans frequently blame celebrities and models for using photo enhancement and re-touching techniques. Hence, they normalise an unrealistic body ideal, which is problematic as they serve as role models for girls and young women. (Sullivan, 2014)



"Up until recently, women have been the focus of body-image related social media studies. However, men are too faced with trends that result in body dissatisfaction i.e. the desire for a muscular and fat body." (Fallazow, 2020)Social Networking, 23(3), pp.189-209

What can be done?

Helping the generation Z become more confident in their own bodies is no easy task. Since the first national lockdown in 2020, there has been a shift on social media towards more body positive content. On instagram and tiktok you see more people showing off their confidence in their bodies no matter their insecurities. However, despite the shift in content there is still more to be done.

support

In a study of social media and body image in early adolescent girls it was found that the most confident of participants noted their resilient attitudes to, parental support and positive school environment.

They displayed high media literacy, appreciation of differences and confidence strategies that appeared helpful in mitigating the potential negative association between social media exposure and body image.

(Burnette, 2017 "I don't need people to tell me I'm pretty on social media.")

education

There is a multitude of pressures and negativity online when the generation don't adhere to certain standards.

A lot of elements are unchecked, especially when it comes to body image.

We have to be very very mindful of educating young people as to what good usage of these social media platforms looks like so they can take the good not the toxic side of it.

(Director + Co – Founder of Tobe- Kit, Nathalie Richards)

potential

Social media platforms mixed with a generation that loves for change means that there is the potential to present much more diverse representations of female and male bodies. (Andsager, 2014)

LOVE YOUR BODY

Summary:

Social media is a powerful tool which can make or break the body image of thousands of young people.

Despite the generation z being one of the most confident and self-assured yet, they have succumbed to the pressures of body image like the generations before them.

The power of influencers, marketers and society in one space infiltrating their lives constantly means they are unable to escape the pressure thrust upon them.

In order to change this pattern it is important to work with this generation to educate those after them and encourage platforms to take responsibility.

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